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CUBA'S CLAIM UPON THE UNITED STATES.

BY O. H. PLATT, UNITED STATES SENATOR FROM CONNECTICUT.

A LITTLE more than four years ago the United States declared war against Spain; it also declared the purpose of the war in which it was about to engage. It gave notice to the world that its object was not conquest or acquisition, that it proposed to liberate the people of Cuba from unendurable oppression and to assist them in the establishment of an independent republic. In all the history of mankind no other instance of a war for such a high, noble, and unselfish purpose can be found. The national conscience asserted itself, and the people were of one heart and one mind. The war was over in a hundred days, but its consequences will last for generations. As a nation we were strong and resourceful; we put forth our strength and used our resources with no thought of repayment; a free Cuba, a new republic were to be our sufficient reward. The world approved and admired our course. The question which now confronts us is whether we shall go forward or turn back; whether we shall complete our success, or permit our effort to result only in ignominious failure.

The doings of nations are like the acts of individuals; motive and action make character both in men and in nations. It is the man of pure motive, of brave deeds and steady purpose who builds for himself a noble character. If the motive, the deed and the purpose are but feeble and soon abandoned, the resultant

character is ignoble. So with us as a people. Though our purpose was lofty, though our triumph was striking, if we fail now in accomplishment we shall be either pitied or despised. Nations, like men, incur honorable obligations. If fulfilled to the letter, true growth is the result; if ignored, by men or nations, the just contempt of mankind is incurred. Our obligation did not cease when Spain was driven from Cuba, or when years of careful and unselfish administration resulted in the establishment of the Cuban republic. When we undertook to put an end to bad government in Cuba, we became responsible for the establishment, and the maintenance as well, of a good government there. The world will properly hold us bound in all honor so to treat the republic which we ourselves have set up that it shall be both prosperous and stable. The United States, if true to its history and its character, must train up its child in the way it should go, so that when old it will not depart from it.

If these words had been written when we set foot on Cuban soil at Daiquiri, they would have met with universal approval, and the exceptional individual who might have predicted that we would tire of our work, and leave Cuba to struggle on unaided by us as soon as its government should have been created on paper and established in name, would have been denounced as nearly akin to a traitor. He would at least have been told that he understood neither the purpose nor the spirit of our people.

In transactions between nations we hear much in these days about "spheres of influence," and perhaps no better interpretation of that phrase is to be found than in the relations which should exist between the United States and Cuba. We are great and strong. We have had a century and a quarter of republican experience. Cuba is small and weak, without experience, a new beginner in self-government. The Island lies within a hundred miles of our shores. It is bound to us by location, by helplessness, and, until now, by the sentiment of gratitude. Thanks to the United States, it is a free and independent government. It is in no sense a dependency, and yet in the truest sense it is a dependent neighbor. Cuba committed her future to us when, in the depth of her misery, she accepted our intervention. We as truly assumed her care when we proffered that intervention.

The United States must have a policy with regard to Cuba. The present question is, what that policy shall be. In the solu-

tion of this question, not only our good name and character, but our own interests are most intimately involved. The fate of the United States is interwoven with the fate of Cuba.

There are three policies, any of which may be pursued by the United States. First, we may treat Cuba with indifference and neglect; second, as a commercial rival to be feared and curbed; third, with a friendly consideration which shall insure her prosperity, stability and gratitude. Until Congress met in December last, the people of the United States entertained no doubt as to which of the three policies should be pursued. We were in honor bound not to neglect Cuba. We had never thought of her as a commercial rival to be feared, but rather as a constituent part of our commercial system. Every obligation of duty and of self-interest demanded our friendly consideration. It may well be doubted whether one per cent. of our people, before the assembling of the last Congress, would have tolerated the idea that Cuba should be treated in any other way than as a neighbor and a close friend. And yet there developed during the winter and early summer a sentiment, founded on misapprehension and prejudice, which was strong enough to defeat for the time being any remedial or beneficent legislation in her behalf. During all the period of our military occupation, leading up to Cuban independence, it was understood that the economic relations between Cuba and the United States were as important as their political relations. When the United States required of Cuba that her constitution should contain guarantees which should forever place her in a position of intimate relation to us, it was universally understood that we, on our part, would aid her by providing such reciprocal commercial advantages as would enable her to be self-reliant and self-supporting. The Monroe Doctrine, which we had declared three-quarters of a century ago and insisted upon as our right, was wrought into a compact between the two countries, so that thenceforth, as to Cuba, it was no longer to rest upon assertion alone but upon constitutional agreement. While we did not ask of Cuba in form that she should not enter into commercial arrangements with other countries to our disadvantage, the natural currents of trade made it a practical impossibility for her to do so, and a Commission sent to us from her Constitutional Convention returned home with the just expectation that a compliance with our desires as to her constitutional guarantees would

be followed by the establishment of mutual trade relations which would prove to be of great economic advantage to her. The Constitutional Convention of Cuba asked, as a return for their acceptance of the provisions which we had requested, that there should be some promise given by the United States of the establishment of advantageous relations with us. In the nature of things such a promise was impossible, but the Convention was asked to act in the premises and to trust the United States. It did incorporate into its constitution provisions which we thought essential for us, and it did trust us to provide by legislation, or treaty, commercial advantages which she could not obtain from other countries. So, up to the opening of our last Congress, all was well. The Cuban constitution was adopted. Complete independence awaited only the necessary successive steps for its establishment. Its merchants, its planters and laborers, waited in trustful confidence that the United States, through its Congress, would provide for the industrial as it had already provided for the political independence of Cuba. Not only was this anticipated in Cuba, but here as well. No one could have foreseen that the United States would deliberately refuse to discharge its obligation. The United States had never been a faith breaker; its worst enemy could not have predicted that it would become one. And then a strange thing happened.

The principal crop of Cuba is cane sugar, or, rather, it may be said that the two principal crops are sugar and tobacco. Until its industries shall have become more diversified, the prosperity of the Island depends upon these crops, and upon its ability to produce them with profit. By reason of the over-production of sugar in the world, of the indebtedness accumulated by planters in Cuba and their losses sustained during the war, it may be asserted without fear of contradiction that, on the whole, sugar production had become unprofitable in the Island. The same was true, though in a lesser degree, of tobacco. The United States could well afford, in return for trade advantages to be secured by us, to make such reductions in the tariff upon sugar, tobacco, and other products of Cuba as would place its industries on a profitable basis, and it was well understood both in Cuba and the United States that such action would be taken. President Roosevelt in his message had recommended such "substantial tariff reductions" as were necessary to insure industrial prosperity.

Then arose a cloud in the sky. We had begun in several States to produce sugar from beets, and for many years we had been producing in one or two States sugar from cane. All at once, and without reason, the cry was raised that any reduction of the duty on sugar coming from Cuba would injure, strike down, and destroy the beet and cane sugar industry of the United States. Members and Senators from States in which these industries were established became first timid, then needlessly frightened, lest their assent to legislation favoring reciprocal trade relations with Cuba would lose them their seats. Most of these Senators and Representatives were Republicans. They were few in number compared to the whole body of Republicans, but they were numerous enough, by joining with the Democrats who were ready for any action which should divide Republican forces, to prevent wise and necessary legislation; and so the contest began.

As time went on facts were ignored, fears were magnified, prejudice invoked, until reason and cool judgment seemed to have entirely departed. Two assertions, neither of which could be sustained by proof, formed the controlling basis of action by the few Republicans who have been spoken of. First, the assertion that, to reduce the tariff on Cuban sugar by twenty-five or even twenty per cent., would take away the protection enjoyed by beet and cane sugar producers in the United States—an assertion which is absolutely groundless, as is shown by the fact that we take into our country, free of duty, 500,000 tons of sugar from Hawaii and Porto Rico, while maintaining the duty against all other countries, without in any way interfering with the protection of our own sugar producers. Second, the assertion that the so-called Sugar Trust would derive all the benefit resulting from any reduction of the duty on Cuban sugar—an assertion which is equally groundless, as is shown by the fact that Hawaiian sugar and Porto Rican sugar, though duty free, have brought the same price in American markets as sugars from Cuba or Germany. The prejudice against the Sugar Trust was continually, and most successfully, appealed to. It was so apparent that any reduction of the duty upon Cuban sugar proposed would not reduce the price of home-produced sugar, that it is not probable that this argument alone could have resulted in defeating the suggested legislation, and so the plea that the Trust, rather than the Cuban planter, was to be benefited was the objection most relied upon.

It is a curious fact that, while there is a popular belief that combinations and trusts control legislation in Congress, it is nevertheless true that the most effective means of preventing legislation is to assert that a combination or trust desires it. Even staid legislators lose their heads when the statement is made that a trust is favoring a measure. The Sugar Trust is, perhaps, the most unpopular of all capitalistic combinations in the United States, and the apprehension excited by continual reiteration that the legislation in question was being supported and would inure to the benefit of the Sugar Trust, was most potent. In the opinion of the writer it was utterly fallacious. That it was successful in defeating for the time being the performance of our plain duty with regard to Cuba, must be admitted. Nowhere in the United States is public sentiment so liable to be misunderstood as in the city of Washington while Congress is in session, and the fear that the beet-sugar industry might possibly be injured, and that the Sugar Trust might possibly reap some benefit as a result of the proposed legislation, was so skilfully manipulated, so cunningly fostered, and so persistently and vigorously reiterated, that the main question was practically obscured. Many members took counsel of their fears rather than of their judgment; fear developed into frenzy; suspicion usurped the province of fact; prejudice was more potent than reason; the well-considered policy of two administrations and an overwhelming sentiment of moral obligation were ignored. Pledges were sought and obtained, until it became apparent that no legislation looking to the relief of Cuba and the extension of our own trade was possible, except such as might be dictated by the Opposition for party advantage without reference to the interests of Cuba or ourselves. The President, in a special message, endeavored to call back the attention of the Congress to the real issue, but without effect, and so Congress adjourned with nothing done.

Meantime, notwithstanding the assertions of the beet-sugar representatives that Cuba was in no need, there is serious financial depression there. How acute it will become, time only can demonstrate. But, worse than financial depression or distress, there has grown up in the minds of the people of Cuba a feeling that the United States has deliberately determined not to keep faith with them. Economic disturbance in a country just starting on the experiment of self-government, with little experience

in that line, is bad enough ; but a settled belief on the part of its people that a nation upon which they have placed their reliance has tricked them, is more sadly to be deplored. The people of Cuba will scarcely understand that the few representatives who have been able temporarily to thwart the will of the people of the United States, do not represent its real sentiment. The respect of Cuba can only be regained when the people of the United States shall have once more passed upon this question, and demonstrated that our real purpose is thwarted only for the time being, and that our "plain duty" is yet to be thoroughly and generously performed. Friends of Cuba in the United States have appealed from the mistaken sentiment of a few of its legislators to the American people. That the appeal will not be in vain there are many hopeful signs. There is such a thing as public conscience in this country, and when once aroused it is all-powerful. The Republican conventions of those States from which objections to this legislation were most strongly urged, have shown, by resolutions adopted by them, that even in those States the heart of the people is right. Wherever our true-hearted and courageous President speaks for justice to Cuba and the performance of national obligation, the people respond as to no other sentiment which he utters. It will only need a re-assembling of Congress to demonstrate that our policy with regard to Cuba is not to be finally obstructed by groundless fear or senseless prejudice ; that our plighted faith is to be observed ; that the United States is still to be the generous friend, the strong protector and unselfish guardian of the Cuban people ; that the republic of Cuba is to be permanently maintained ; that the pledge of the United States is not to be violated, either in letter or in spirit ; that no movement for the annexation of Cuba is to be started or supported here ; but that, as time goes on, Cuba, free and independent, guided and aided by us in the realization of her dream of liberty, will continue and remain an object lesson to all nations of the high purpose and noble action of the United States.

O. H. PLATT.